

READING COMPREHENSION

GRADE 5

READ AND DISCOVER

Directions: Read "The Pony Express" and answer the questions.

1. What was the primary purpose of the Pony Express?
 A delivering gold to California
 B providing horses for cowboys
 C cutting travel time for mail delivery
 D building stagecoaches
2. In which year did the Pony Express start its mail service?
 A 1830
 B 1840
 C 1850
 D 1870
3. How long did the Pony Express take to deliver mail from Missouri to California?

THE PONY EXPRESS

Today, there are many ways to quickly send messages halfway across the world, whether it's a text, email, or even video chat. It is very easy for us to talk to people far away. That was not always the case. Long ago, people relied on the postal service to communicate with others.

In 1850, it took about 25 days to send a letter from one side of the United States to California. In those days, California was quickly growing. Thousands of people moved to California in hopes of finding gold. The problem was that because they moved so far away, it was hard to communicate with family and friends they had left behind on the other side of the country. It took a very long time to deliver messages, newspapers, and mail.

In 1850, three businessmen, William H. Russell, Alexander Majors, and William B. Waddell, made a solution. Together, they started the Pony Express. The Pony Express was a mail service that started in Joseph, Missouri. It stretched for 1,900 miles to Sacramento, California. They wanted to cut the travel time in half, so they wanted to be able to get a letter from Missouri to California in only 10 days. Many people thought this was impossible.

The three men knew that having riders instead of stagecoaches would be much faster and easier. They hired 120 riders and bought 400 horses. They also built 154 stations. Riders had to be under 125 pounds so that the horses didn't have to carry a heavy load. The riders were only allowed to take a gun for protection, some food, and their mochila.

The mochila (Spanish for backpack) was a pouch that carried the letters. Each pouch could hold up to 20 pounds of mail. There was a station every ten miles along the 1,900-mile route. The riders would ride a horse of full speed from one station to the next. They would then switch to a fresh horse and ride the next leg. They would ride both day and night.

Even though it worked well, the Pony Express only lasted for 19 months. Part of the reason was that it was very expensive to send a letter through the Pony Express. At first, the price was \$5 per 1/2 ounce. That would be about \$130 in today's money. The price was lowered, but a lot of people still couldn't afford it. The invention of the telegraph also caused the Pony Express to end. The telegraph allowed instant communication across the country. The Pony Express couldn't compete with that. On October 26, 1861, the Pony Express closed. This was just two days after the announcement of the transcontinental telegraph.

The Pony Express was an amazing service. It may seem very old-fashioned to us. When you think about it, though, it should make us much more thankful for the quick ways that we can communicate with people all over the world today.



Shelly Rees

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Karin Nielsen-Saines



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